DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 065 TM 830 534

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TITLE	Seventh-Graders' Conceptions of Teachers: A Cultural Analysis.
INSTITUTION	Far West Lab. for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	22 Mar 82
CONTRACT	400-80-01-03
NOTE	39p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (66th, New York, NY, March 22, 1982).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Research; *Cultural Influences; Ethnography; Grade 7; Interviews; Junior High Schools; Models; *Student Attitudes; *Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This study elaborates the cultural categories of meanings used by seventh-graders at a junior high school to describe their teachers. It examines the common expressions students used in open-ended interviews to describe their teachers and their experience within these teachers' classes. A semantic structure that underlies the terms that students used to describe their teachers was conceptualized in the following form: the highest level of abstraction and generalizability were four foci (academic work, instructional facility, classroom experience, and personal characteristics), each of which subsumed between two and four themes. Each theme referred to a spectrum of individual variation of a teacher's possible behavior and style of personality, with two evaluatively opposed contrast poles at which students' descriptions clustered. Together, these foci and themes provide students with a semiotic space which is rich enough to convey their experiences of school life, and at the same time has the definition and specificity necessary for effective and precise communication with peers. The structure provides insight into the communication system, and the perceptions and values, of the sub-culture which students form for themselves within a school. (PN)

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SEVENTH-GRADERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS*

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Educational Research and Development

Paper presented at Session 48.24, Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association,
March 22, 1982, New York, NY

TM 830 534

*(Originally titled: Boring Teachers -- Or the Phenomenology of the Seventh-Grader)

The authors wish to acknowledge the support of the National Institute of Education, Department of Education, under NIE Contract 400-80-01-03 to the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, California. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Institute and no official endorsement by the National Institute of Education should be inferred.

This study seeks to elaborate the cultural categories of meaning used by the seventh-graders at a junior high school to describe their teachers. Employing interpretive techniques and assumptions, it explores the world of the classroom from the perspective of the seventh-grade student.

Investigation of first-person categories of thought spontaneously expressed by students is relatively rare in the educational literature.[1] This omission is unfortunate, for students consistently use such expressions to conceptualize and discuss their classroom experience, and we believe that such ways of talking and thinking reflect students' expectations for the instructional and managerial behaviors they encounter in the classrooms of different teachers. Students, we further hypothesize, often act (consciously or unconsciously) in accordance with their expectations. Should one wish to understand (and even predict) student behavior within the classroom, then an analysis of the way in which students conceptualize their teachers is an important first step. This paper is devoted to just such an analysis.

The research we discuss here examines the common expressions students used in open-ended interviews to describe their teachers and their experience within these teachers' classes. We assume that:

> Language is more than a means of communication about reality: it is a tool for constructing reality. Different languages create and express different realities. They categorize experience in different ways. They provide alternative patterns for customary ways of thinking and perceiving. (Spradley, 1979:17)

Common linguistic expressions have their origin in a social context; they express the implicit system of meanings which is shared by members of the same culture. This study is predicated on the assumption that the words that seventh-graders use to describe teachers reflect shared categories of meaning. By examining the significance of these words, we attempt to understand seventh-grade culture, or "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (Spradley, 1979:5). Because we are focusing on students' descriptions of teachers, our discussion of seventh-grade culture begins (and to some degree, ends) with students' interpretations of their classroom experience. Although the classroom provides only one arena for experience as a seventh-grader, it is a central one. Most of a student's time at school is taken up by classes. Moreover, academic performance and deportment in these classes influence other aspects of a student's school experience. "Honor" students gain school-wide recognition and status as well as special privileges. "Problem" students, who violate academic or behavioral norms, also receive school-wide recognition in the form of stigmatization. Being seventh-grader requires, above all, coping with classes and teachers. An examination of seventh-grade culture does well to begin with this central aspect of school experience.

In attempting to describe the participants' points of view, we are not studying individual differences in student's perceptions of teachers, but rather the universal descriptive categories used by students to characterize the teachers and classroom events they encountered each day. We thus assume that seventh-graders draw from (as well as construct) a common pool of characterizations that they apply to their daily experience. Our analytic task is to elaborate the nature of these characterizations. In so doing, we assume that there is an implicit organizational framework uniting the characterizations under study. We are joined in such an assumption by those cultural anthropologists who share an interpretive turn of mind. Spradley, for example, asserts:

> An informant's cultural knowledge is more than random bits of information; this knowledge is organized into categories, all of which are systematically related to the entire culture. [Analysis] . . . is the search for the parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by informants.
> (1979:93, emphasis in text)

Such an interpretive analysis is a particularly sensitive undertaking because it requires the analyst to make explicit in writing what has been implicit in expression. Moreover, it charges the analyst with the revelation of assumptions made by others rather than the imposition of one's own. As the early anthropologist Franz Boas cautioned:

> If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours.
> (1943:311)

Method

Our initial task was to establish the cultural categories students naturally used to describe their teachers. Eight terms were selected from the transcripts of unstructured interviews we had previously conducted with 12 male and 10 female students. These terms were: mean, hard, easy, good, strict, boring, fun, and nice.

After formulating this list, we conducted a second set of individual interviews with most of the same students.2 Although these interviews were unstructured in that they were not based on a common set of questions or a common questioning sequence, they followed the same general format. We asked students to describe the characteristics of teachers who would be typified by the eight terms listed above. These words were printed on 3 x 5 cards. We laid these cards, one at a time, before the students, and asked them what a "mean" (or "hard" or "easy," etc.) teacher was like. Throughout the interviews, probes were used to elicit detailed responses.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Working with the complete set of transcriptions, we broke apart the flow of student speech into groups of words that made up a "definition statement." Each definition statement expressed a single descriptive characterization and is the conceptual and empirical units on which the following analysis is based.

As an example of this process, consider the way we treated one boy's definition of a "fun teacher." When we had asked him what a fun teacher was like, he had responded:

> A funny teacher who cracks a lot of jokes and he's funny or he does a lot of projects, and stuff, and not, doesn't give you too much homework and stuff like that.

This verbatim statement was broken into the following three definition statements: (1) a funny teacher who cracks a lot of jokes and he's funny; (2) he does a lot of projects, and stuff; (3) not, doesn't give you too much homework and stuff like that.

After combing all of the interviews for definition statements, we examined the resulting statements with the intent of sorting them into a manageable set of "foci." We were seeking superordinate, abstract concepts that could encompass the more specific and delimited definition statements. After much discussion, re-reading and several attempts at classificatory schemes, the following four foci were established: (1) Academic Work; (2) Instructional Facility; (3) Classroom Experience; and (4) Personal Characteristics. At this point in the analysis, no attention was given to the type of teacher who had evoked the definition statement, nor was it necessary for each teacher type to be mentioned with respect to each focus. Our concern was merely to identify focus around which groups of definition statements could be said to "cluster."

Having subdivided the population of definition statements into foci, we examined all of the statements that made up a single focus. It was apparent that each focus could be further delineated, and we set out to determine the common "themes" that made up each focus. We considered each theme to be a discrete facet of meaning sufficiently broad that it did not merely echo the manifest content of the definition statements, but reflected the quality of teacher behavior or classroom life to which the respondent was referring. It was at the level of theme that the nuances of expression used by students to distinguish types of teachers were most fully explored.

We considered the definition statements again and formulated tentative theme categorizations. At this point, we became aware that students' definition statements not only contained descriptions of teachers and classroom events, but also made explicit evaluative judgments about classroom experience. For example, students spoke about the amount of work that teachers expected them to complete, and compared teachers who assigned "too much" work with those who "don't" pile the work on." We began to think of themes as stretching between

two "contrast poles" that delineated the conceptual end points of the continuum of meaning represented by each theme. The establishment of foci, themes, and contrast poles marked the completion of the conceptual framework used to unravel the cultural meanings of the terms seventh-graders' employed to conceptualize their teachers and classroom experiences.

The final coding of definition statements by focus, theme, and contrast pole was the responsibility of the senior author of this paper. Three criteria guided his ultimate attempt to make the implicit explicit. First, and most importantly, the establishment of themes and contrast poles had to contain and reflect accurately the contents of the definition statements. Second, the conceptual structure of foci, themes, and contrast poles had to demonstrate its own internal logic. Finally, this conceptual framework had to evoke intuitive recognition and confirmation. Classifications and categories had to make both logical and intuitive sense, and satisfy all of the interpreter's critical faculties. As this description of the final coding process suggests, an interpretive analysis inevitably bears the mark of the interpreter. While requiring a searching consideration of the significance of the words and ways of thought of others, it is affected to some extent by the intellectual inclinations and intuitions of the interpreter. Although we have done our best to portray seventh-graders' perceptions of teachers, we remind the reader that this portrayal reflects our formulation of these perceptions.

Before proceeding to the results, we must raise a final methodological issue. Below, we consider numerical data illustrating students' association of the eight cultural terms (or "teacher types") with the and contrast poles described earlier. We employed the following coding procedure to make the leap from narrative description to quantitative association. First, each theme was divided into two nominal categories. We conceived of these categories as encompassing one-half of the continuum of meaning represented by the themes, and named each nominal category according to the contrast pole it included. Thus the theme, "Quantity of Work," was considered to contain two subcategories of meaning: "Less Work" and "More Work." The number of definition statements reflecting a particular theme and contrast pole mentioned with regard to the eight terms or teacher types could then be calculated. Second, the number of definition statements falling within each contrast pole was determined for each of the twelve themes.

As the coding of definition statements by focus and theme continued, we became aware that there was some variation in the number of definition statements used by individual students to explain the meaning of the eight terms in question. Such differences were related to both the probing technique of the interviewer, and the loquaciousness of the respondent. To diminish the impact of these variations, no more than one definition statement per student was coded for each teacher type mentioned with reference to each theme. Thus, if a student recounted three distinct ways good teachers communicate their interest in students, only one of these definition statements was coded.

Because of the small number of students interviewed, the numerical data that appears in the second discussion of the results should be approached warily. Moreover, a myopic focus on the percentage of definition statements associated with each theme and contrast pole may detract from the distinctive contribution that this interpretive analysis has to offer: a depiction of seventh-graders' conceptions of teachers and classroom experience. With these cautions in mind, let us proceed to a discussion of our findings.

Results

Two separate analyses are discussed below. The first establishes the interpretive structure of foci, themes, and contrast poles used to define seventh-graders conceptions of their teachers. The second examines the association of different types of teachers with the various themes and contrast poles, and concludes with a summary description of each teacher type.

An Elaboration of Foci, Themes, and Contrast Poles

Table 1 displays the conceptualization that emerged from our analysis of definition statements. We will discuss each focus, and the themes that delineate these foci, in turn.

I. Academic Work Focus. A number of definition statements described aspects of the classroom tasks assigned by teachers each day. Consequently, the Academic Work Focus was established. Three distinct themes delineate students' perceptions of academic work. These themes refer to: (1) the quantity of work teachers assigned; (2) the difficulty of this work; and (3) the grading standards teachers used to evaluate it. We consider each of these themes and its contrast poles below.

A. Quantity of work. Definition statements consistently referred to the amount of work teachers assigned. Moreover, as students described different sorts of teachers, they made explicit distinctions between teachers who assigned "less work" and "more work." The contrast poles for this theme were thus self-evident. Definition statements that defined the "less work" contrast pole included:

> Well, [they don't] give you a lot of work in class. Not a lot of homework. And like if you work real hard they won't make you do it overnight. You could finish in class the next day.
>
> (Student A24)

Students also spoke of being assigned large quantities of work. Typical comments reflecting the "more work" contrast pole included:

Table 1

Summary of Foci, Themes, and Contrast Poles

FOCI	THEMES	CONTRAST POLES
I. Academic Work	(A) Quantity of Work	Less Work ---------- More Work
	(B) Difficulty of Work	Easy Work ---------- Hard Work
	(C) Grading Standards	Lenient ---------- Demanding
II. Instructional Facility	(A) Quality of Explanations	Inadequate ---------- Clear
	(B) Individual Assistance	Not Available ---------- Available
III. Classroom Experience	(A) Disciplinary Strategy	Punishment ---------- Warning
	(B) Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior	Low ---------- High
	(C) Student Self-Management	Discouraged ---------- Encouraged
	(D) Affective Character	Disagreeable ---------- Engaging
IV. Personal Characteristics	(A) Temperament	Unappealing ---------- Appealing
	(B) Temper	Yells ---------- Doesn't Yell
	(C) Relationship with Students	Uncaring ---------- Interested

> [They] give you a lot of work and make you do it there, and if you don't you got a lot of homework.
>
> (Student A9)

B. Difficulty of work. The second theme within the Academic Work Focus concerned the difficulty of the classwork and homework students were expected to complete. Students contended that almost any assignment can become difficult if it is very long, or due at the same time a number of other assignments are due. In this manner, then, "hard" work not only refers to work that is intrinsically difficult, but also work that is "hard to finish."

At the "easy work" contrast pole, students spoke of the unchallenging assignments given by some teachers. For instance:

> [He'll] give you easy work that's fun . . . instead of the hard, hard work. He'll um, make it easier like on a ditto or something like that.
>
> (Student A23)

Students made specific comments about the "hard" work assigned by other teachers. For example:

> [The] teacher gives them hard work. But I think that's good, because you learn more.
>
> (Student A21)

C. Grading standards. The final theme that emerged from analysis of the definition statements focusing on academic work concerned the grading standards teachers applied to completed assignments or tests. Typical definition statements that defined the "demanding" contrast pole included:

> [The teacher] grades hard, is kinda unfair with your grades.
>
> (Student A27)

At the "lenient" contrast pole were two terse definition statements:

> They grade easy.
>
> (Student A18)

> [The teacher] might grade easier.
>
> (Student A5)

The definition statements that described the academic work focus clustered about the contrast poles of each theme. It would appear that teachers who assigned a moderate amount of work, which was

not perceived as unusually hard or inappropriately easy, and who applied expected grading standards, were not salient to students, while those teachers whose behavior defined the contrast pole for each theme were perceived as noteworthy.

We suspect this result is an artifact of the stimulus adjectives that defined the teacher types under investigation. It appears that students spontaneously labeled teachers as "hard" or "easy" or "good" or "mean" when such teachers' academic expectations and classroom behavior were perceived as somehow out of the ordinary. Other teachers, who did not challenge students' expectations, were not spontaneously labeled. Instead, they were accepted as a taken-for-granted aspect of school experience.

While this hypothesis explains the preponderance of definition statements that define the contrast poles and the lack of student responses that refer to the middle of the continuum represented by each theme, it has no bearing on the fact that students clearly considered the academic work they were assigned to be an important feature when asked to define different teacher types. In short, the nature of the academic work assigned is a defining characteristic of teachers,

II. Instructional Facility Focus. The second major focus of the comments students made about various types of teachers concerned the proficiency with which teachers carried out their instructional responsibilities. Two themes emerged that further defined students' perceptions of the instructional process: (1) the quality of teachers' explanations; and (2) instructional assistance provided students. We consider each theme below.

A. Quality of explanations. Students' comments focused repeatedly on the clarity with which teachers explained new material and clarified students' confusions regarding the assignments they were expected to complete. Some teachers were characterized as giving inadequate explanations, while others were described as providing clear, understandable explanations.

Definition statements describing the "inadequate" contrast pole included:

> Well, they'll give you work that you don't understand or something like that, and they won't really explain it to you. They'll explain it to you a little bit, but not enough.
>
> (Student A28)

These definition statements were complemented by others that described the "clear" contrast pole:

> [He] would, you know, really explain it to you and make you understand it. You could come in after school. Stuff like that.
>
> (Student A25)

B. Individual assistance. The individual assistance theme, like the preceding quality of explanations theme, stretched between contrast poles describing inadequate and adequate instructional procedures. At one end of this continuum, students described teachers who were not available to students, or who refused to answer individual questions. For example:

> [He will] tell you to stay in your seat and be quiet and don't raise your hand or do anything.
>
> (Student A9)

The actions of one teacher were particularly exemplary of this contrast pole and were discussed by one student at length:

> Well, she'll like, we'll ask her a question and then she'll say, "I'm not going to answer that question," and then . . . I go, "Why not?" She'll say, "I don't feel like answering questions like that."
>
> WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS WOULD THAT BE?[3]
>
> How to do the papers that she gives us. She gives like little cards to do our reading, our reading cards. [I say,] "I don't understand this part," and she'll say, "I won't answer a question like that."
>
> (Student A17)

Students' comments suggested that they were genuinely pained when teachers refused to answer students' questions about assignments or provide other forms of individual assistance. One girl described this as "not being on speaking terms":

> Teacher AD, I don't . . . he's not on speaking terms. He doesn't listen that much. It seems he's got a hearing problem or something.
>
> WHAT DO YOU MEAN, HE'S NOT ON SPEAKING TERMS?
>
> Well, like when you want to talk to him, when you raise your hand, it takes a while to get over to you. There's nobody else; you're the only one raising your hand, and he'll just look around the class. Then finally he'll come over and say, "Read it more." He doesn't talk to you that much.
>
> (Student A18)

At the contrasting pole of the theme were definition statements that described the instructional procedures used by other teachers

who were available to help students with assignments and clarify instructions. For example:

> Um, when you raise your hand she'll come to you right away. She won't say, "Put your hand down, I'll come to you later."
>
> (Student A22)

Taken as a whole, the definition statements that fell within the instructional facility focus suggested that students wanted to learn the material they were assigned and sought to complete their academic tasks competently. Disappointment and anger were expressed when teachers' instructional behaviors were perceived as impeding students from understanding and completing their assigned work. Conversely, the seventh-graders seemed quite appreciative when teachers helped students to learn by giving clear explanations of the material they were expected to master and by being responsive to each student's questions and problems.

In short, students expected their instructors to be teachers in the root sense of the word: One who shows others how to master a subject. From the students' point of view, an instructor who abandoned students to their own devices in the face of ambiguous worksheets and confusing lectures was cheating students of the quality instruction they felt to be their prerogative. Students seemed to consider the interactive processes of teaching and learning as two parts of a bargain; they were willing to learn the assigned material as long as teachers' instructional practices facilitated their learning. When teachers did not keep up their part of the classroom contact while continuing to assess and reward student performance, mutterings of "Foul" appeared in the transcripts as students responded to this injustice with strong (if often surreptitious) emotions.

III. Classroom Experience Focus. Many definition statements described the complexities of students' classroom lives and were grouped under the general focus of Classroom Experience. Four identifiable themes emerged from examination of these statements: (1) disciplinary strategy; (2) tolerance for inappropriate behavior; (3) student self-management; and (4) affective character. We consider each of these themes below.

A. Disciplinary strategy. A major part of many students' classroom experience was related to the general disciplinary strategy employed by the teacher. A significant distinction emerged between teachers who punished students swiftly without an initial warning and those teachers who warned students that their behavior was inappropriate and that punishment would follow if the behavior did not change. To capture this distinction, the contrast poles of "punishment" and "warning" were established.

Looking first at the definition statements that clustered near the "punishment" contrast pole, we find the comments such as the following.

He's really mean. He'll give you detention if someone throws a piece of paper at you or something, and you intentionally don't.

(Student A14)

In contrast to those teachers who dealt with misbehavior by punishing students, other teachers were perceived as being less quick to react. These teachers generally warned students that were heading for trouble. For example:

[She] treats you good like if you, some teachers if you talk they'll give you detention. Others will just tell you to be quiet and do your work. Give you a couple warnings.

AND THEN WHAT?

And then, if you don't behave after a while I think they will give you detention. Some teachers will. Others won't. They'll keep telling you to be quiet.

(Student A24)

B. Tolerance for inappropriate behavior. Students referred explicitly to various teachers' apparent willingness to tolerate inappropriate behavior in the classroom. Although this theme was closely related to the preceding theme and appears in some of the definition statements presented above, we believe the themes to be conceptually distinct. While the preceding theme of disciplinary strategy illuminates the teachers' reactions to inappropriate behavior, the current theme describes how much misbehavior the teacher is willing to tolerate before reacting. It is the case, however, that teachers who punished students without warning generally had a low tolerance for any sort of misbehavior.

Definition statements describing teachers with low tolerance for misbehavior defined one pole of this theme. For example:

[The teacher] doesn't let the kids get away with anything . . . .

(Student A21)

Student A16 summed up the most important strategy for negotiating the classes of teachers like those portrayed above: ". . . remember to watch out!"

At the opposite pole of this theme, students spoke of teachers who demonstrated high tolerance for student misconduct. The definition statements delineating this contrast pole included the following:

> She warns you a lot. And she says, "This is my final warming." About 15 minutes later she says the same thing.
>
> (Student A25)

Students did not, however, always respect such laxity. One boy remarked:

> Like I been, people been tardy and so many times in um, Teacher AG's class that, he don't care. He just let's 'em walk in. He says, "You're tardy." They say, "So what?" And he walks away. He doesn't do anything. He's nowhere near a strict teacher . . . He's not even considered a teacher sometimes the way he acts.
>
> (Student A15)

Another spoke of the necessity for a well-run classroom where people could attend to their work without distraction.

> Well if someone's goofing off to the point that disturbed the whole class, I think you should say something.
>
> (Student A21)

C. Student self-management. Students characterized different types of teachers according to the responsibilities they were granted within the classroom. Some teachers actively discouraged students' attempts to manage themselves, while others encouraged student management of behavior and classroom activity. Teachers who discouraged student self-management generally did so by limiting students' mobility and their opportunities to talk to and work with their peers. In general, such teachers also curtailed the decisions students could make regarding academic participation in the classroom and the content of assigned work. Definition statements defining the "discouraged" contrast pole of this theme included:

> If you break your pencil you can't sharpen it, you can't get a drink on hot days, or not any talking or anything.
>
> (Student A14)

Students also commented on the lack of opportunity to work with other students:

> Well, [the] teacher would at any times, wouldn't let us talk, work together, you know, if we have something we've got to work on together, or if after we're finished with our work, be able to chat, or something. Keep ourselves busy.
>
> (Student A18)

It is striking that students did not discriminate teachers' nonacademic prohibitions, such as getting out of one's seat or going to the bathroom, from those of a more academic nature, like working with or giving help to fellow students. Instead, students seemed to lump all restrictions together. As Student A11 commented:

> A strict teacher would be one that . . . would be one that would say that you couldn't do a whole bunch of things.

At the contrasting pole of this theme, students spoke appreciatively of teachers who encouraged them to act in responsible and independent ways, and who allowed a certain amount of movement within the classroom. Typical definition statements describing this contrast pole included:

> Well, it's when like the teacher doesn't always make you be quiet or something. They'll let you whisper between your friends or something.
>
> (Student A11)

In addition to the generally nonacademic pursuits mentioned above, students spoke of ways in which teachers encouraged them to manage their in-class time. Some teachers, for example, allowed students a choice over their activities once they had completed all of the assigned work.

> [Some teachers let] you do your own thing . . . they tell you to do something, you just do it without them telling you not to do this and not to do that wrong on it . . . [they] give you extra time to do anything you want like the last five minutes of the, if you had a seventh period, the last like ten minutes you could just put, do anything you want.
>
> (Student A8)

An examination of the definition statements delineating both contrast poles of the student self-management theme suggests that the result of these various strategies to encourage student initiative and allow certain freedoms was to strengthen students' enjoyment of, and, perhaps, commitment to the work they completed. In addition, the general atmosphere of the classroom was affected as a result of providing opportunities for talk, movement, and self-direction. Students spoke positively about those teachers who encouraged initiative, movement and self-expression. As one girl said:

> His class is fun because you can mainly do anything you want to, except for, you know, really bad things.
>
> (Student A14)

Conversely, there was sometimes a sense of quiet outrage pervading students' descriptions of teachers who refused to let them sharpen pencils when necessary, work with other students, or engage in activities perceived as essential. Students saw no reason for these restrictions, and occasionally expressed resentment toward teachers who constrained their activities in unjust ways:

> [She] takes the brush away. She doesn't let you get a drink of water.
>
> WHY IS THAT STUFF MEAN?
>
> 'Cause sometimes kids need to brush their hair or get a drink of water or something like that.
>
> AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE THERE TO LEARN AND YOU CAN'T BE RUNNING GETTING A DRINK OF WATER?
>
> Well, sometimes she's not, she's not teaching or saying anything. She's sitting down at her desk and you still can't get a drink of water.
>
> (Student A16)

Such perceived injustice would seem to be logically linked with students' negative appraisal of the class in general, hostility towards the teacher, and grudging acquiescence when confronted with assigned work.

D. Affective character. The final theme depicting students' perceptions of their classroom experience described students' evaluations of the overall affective character of their classes. This theme was somewhat related to the preceding theme in that students tended to evaluate classes positively and find them engaging if they were given responsibility and encouraged to take charge of their classroom activities. A positive or negative response to a particular class, however, could also be associated with a particular teacher's personality or instructional program, and consequently, the affective character theme is conceptually distinct from the previous theme.

A number of definition statements explicitly defined the "disagreeable" pole of the affective character theme. For some students, certain classes were disagreeable because of the way the teacher organized the lesson and presented the material. For example:

> He would just talk straight, you know. He would talk like a computer. "8 + 8 is . . . 4 + . . ."

> you know. He would just talk straight. And that gets boring if the teacher just talks like a machine or a robot or something. It bores you to death and you're sitting there drifting off into another land or something.
>
> (Student A13)

For others, it was the character of the work itself which was disagreeable.

> . . . then he hands out a worksheet that's real boring. Sometimes it's easy. Usually it's easy if it's boring. If it's, if it's an extra story to read, I don't like 'em cause those stories are real boring. They, you do the same thing every week. That I forgot to tell you that um, sometimes they can be hard, and those borings, um, those boring things. If you do 'em once in a while and they're hard, then they're gonna be fun.
>
> (Student A15)

In contrast, some definition statements referred to classrooms where students were engaged in the instructional and nonacademic activities occuring there. Definition statements at the "engaging" contrast pole provided examples of students who enjoyed coming to class. Three factors seemed to be associated with students' engagement. First, some assignments were perceived as interesting, either because of their inherent character or because they offered a change of pace. For example:

> She does fun things with her class. Like in eighth-grade Spanish, they cook enchiladas and stuff like that in there.
>
> (Student A25)

One student summed up the consequences of these activities on student engagement:

> It seems like the time goes faster when you're doing something you like instead of doing just work, boring work.
>
> (Student A8)

Instructional activities, however, were not always sufficient in themselves to encourage student engagement. Often the personality of the teacher appeared to be inextricably intertwined with the assigned work, and this personality-assignment linkage was also described by students. Definition statements that delineated this factor included:

> He just, he um, he makes fun things to do. He has these sheets. He calls them handy-dandy Arnold sheets, and they're for a book that we're using.[4] But he makes 'em fun to do so they're not hard and boring like usual.
>
> (Student A28)

Finally, the third factor that was mentioned in conjunction with the positive pole of the student engagement theme was the entertaining character of teachers' personalities. This factor appeared to be conceptually distinct from the previous factor in that the mere presence of some teachers (rather than the attraction they instilled into their assignments) made the class engaging. A number of definition statements referred to some teachers' propensities to joke and have fun with the class. For example:

> He sings all the time . . . opera: everybody laughs. It's funny the way he sings it.
>
> (Student A14)

For many students, the personality of the teacher seemed to be the major defining factor in their perceptions of the class. Consequently, this was a crucial factor in encouraging student engagement. As Student A16 pointed out, it is the "teacher that makes the class interesting." This was echoed by Student A8 as he described a defining characteristic of the "nice" teacher:

> . . . just how they do, how they do their whatever they have to do -- teach. They do, just it's more fun.
>
> (Student A8)

Taken as a whole, the definition statements that make up the Classroom Experience focus depict concerns common to most people who find themselves part of a social organization that stresses task accomplishment and is characterized by hierarchial authority relations. Such concerns include: (1) What is the definition of appropriate and inappropriate behavior? (2) What are the consequences of inappropriate behavior? (3) What responsibilities, freedoms and opportunities for self-expression are offered me? and (4) How do I feel about my experience as a member of such a social institution? In short, the classroom experience focus includes themes which describe individual's experience of social institutions.

This is not to imply that most students conciously reflect upon the above questions, or purposively plan their classroom behavior with such questions (or the answers to such questions) in mind. Rather, we would expect the prominence of these concerns to modulate from conscious to subliminal awareness as students "learn each teacher's system" and form expectations for their behavior and the enjoyment to be found in their classes. Students' expectations should, we believe,

be strongly related to the range, frequency and intensity of behaviors students demonstrate in different classrooms as well as the enthusiasm they bring to their assignments.

Our respondents' attention to the opportunities different types of teachers offered for self-management bears further discussion. In part, this would seem to be due to the implicit relationship between opportunities for self-management and the affective character of classroom experience: students reported that they experience both engagment and enjoyment in the classes of teachers who provided opportunities for self-management. For one thing, such classes allowed more opportunities to talk with friends, and thus provide some satisfaction of the need for peer-focused social interaction considered by most developmental psychologists to be a major adolescent motivation (cf., Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Erickson, 1968, Havighurst, 1953). The note of resentment, outrage, and bewilderment found in some of the definition statements describing the types of teachers who discouraged self-management, however, suggests that it is more than social hedonism that makes this theme salient to students.

Another psychological force which emerges during adolescence is a need for autonomous self-expression. We suspect that the initial stirrings of this motivation may be behind the intensity with which students chastized the more constraining teacher types. For those boys and girls who feel a powerful urge to express themselves and manage their own affairs, denial of the right to sharpen their pencils, to choose their assignment, or to leave their seats to get a drink of water is more than a silly inconvenience; it is an affront to their evolving status as independent young men and women competent to manage their own affairs.

While such an explanation can help us to interpret the outrage expressed in some of the definition statements, it does not provide a prescription for teacher behavior. We are not advocating that teachers should give students more responsibility to manage their own classroom activities. Such a blanket pronouncement can only be inappropriate, and would lead to varying results with different teachers and different groups of students. We do, however, wish to emphasize that adolescent students generally experience powerful drives for autonomous expression, and such developmental urges can often be harnessed to appropriate academic tasks with favorable results. Moreover, teachers' attempts to constrain these urges may lead to a good deal of stubborn recalcitrance from students.

IV. Personal Characteristics Focus. The final focus of definition statements was upon the personal characteristics of various teachers. While students often described teachers in conjunction with their instructional programs, they also referred to their characteristics as individuals and the ways in which they interacted with students. Three distinct themes emerged from inspection of the definition statements and delineated the Personal Characteristics Focus. These themes were: (1) temperament; (2) temper; and (3) relationships with students.

A. Temperament. A large group of definition statements captured students' perceptions of teachers' temperaments. These statements described the teachers with appealing and unappealing temperaments. At the "unappealing" end of the temperament continuum were comments like the following.

> They might just, it seems like they're always in a grouchy mood or something.
>
> (Student A5)

At the "appealing" contrast pole, students described teacher types displaying positive characteristics. There were a number of definition statements that included adjectives such as kind, nice, happy, generous, helpful, humorous, and fun. For example:

> [She] is really nice to you all the time, I guess, and you know, they don't give you hard times at all.
>
> (Student A22)

Students also spoke of the changeability of temperament demonstrated by some teachers.

> She would be kind of in between being nice . . . sometimes she'd be kinda mean or something, and sometimes she'd be nice.
>
> (Student A11)

B. Temper. A number of definition statements were concerned with the anger displayed in the classroom by some teachers. Conversely, students also referred to the restraint shown by other instructors. Inspection of these definition statements suggested contrast poles reflecting the concreteness of student talk: "yells" and "doesn't yell."

At the "yells" contrast pole were emphatic descriptions of the anger some instructors expressed:

> Oh, they always, they're always yelling like my English teacher, she's kind of mean and . . . she has these big things in the class when she's mad. She pounds on it and it hurts my ears. I sit right in front of it.
>
> WHAT IS IT SHE POUNDS ON?
>
> It's just these desk things. She uses her fist and she hits on it.
>
> (Student A22)

The opposite contrast pole consisted of descriptions of teachers who rarely lost their temper in class and, consequently, rarely yelled at their students. For example:

> A nice teacher, first off, she doesn't yell.
>
> (Student A25)

C. Relationships with students. The final theme that emerged as part of teachers' personal characteristics concerned the nature of the relationships they established with students. At one pole of this theme were teachers who maintained their distance and appeared relatively unconcerned with the details of students' lives, thoughts, or affections. For example:

> Like, they don't care. They just want, they just like to get you in trouble. Well, not really, they just want to catch you.
>
> (Student A21)

At the other extreme, students spoke of teachers who established close relationships with their classes and were interested in their students. For example:

> And um, you have a friendly relationship with your teacher instead of just her giving you the books, uh, the work and telling you to do it.
>
> (Student A25)

Perhaps Student A26 provided the best summary statement:

> They can relate with the kids.

The focus was clearly related to the three previous foci in that teachers' personal characteristics influenced the work they assigned, the way they taught their classes and maintained discipline among students, and the enjoyment students derived from being in these classes. Nevertheless, students also spoke of their instructors as individuals in their own right, with distinguishing characteristics. At times, students separated the personal characteristics of the individual from the role occupied. Other times, the role was perceived as an inalienable characteristic of the individual role incumbent ("such as the "grouchy old teacher"). This "figure/ground" distinction between personal characteristics and institutional role raises questions for further investigation such as: What behaviors do students attribute to role-related rather than personal characteristics? What other types of information do teachers display to the class regarding their personal characteristics? How and when is this information communicated? These and other questions would appear to present fertile ground for future investigation.

Concluding Remarks. This completes our elaboration of the characteristics to which seventh-graders refer when asked to describe different types of teachers. Taken a whole, the broad outlines of the themes and foci suggest intuitive confirmation. Asked to describe different types of teachers, students refer to the work they are assigned, their instructors' facility as teachers, the institutional characteristics of classrooms and teachers' personal characteristics. Although one may disagree about the categorization of individual definition statements or the labels given different themes, it is difficult to name additional characteristics necessary to delineate a broad range of classroom experiences and teacher characteristics.

In the following analysis, we examine the relationship of the cultural terms that describe different teacher types (good, mean, boring, fun, nice, hard, strict, easy) and the themes and contrast poles found to be salient in student thought. To be sure, these descriptive terms use a broad brush to depict teachers while ignoring individual subtleties. Our goal, it must be remembered, is not the discrimination of individual variations, but rather the depiction of behaviors and characteristics typically associated with different types of teachers. To this task we now turn.

A Thematic Definition of Teacher Types

The following discussion relies upon the interpretive schema elaborated above to describe the characteristics of the eight teacher types. We begin by examining the teacher types associated with each theme and contrast pole. Table 2 displays the number and percentage of definition statements made with reference to each teacher type. We then present a theme-by-theme analysis and conclude with a summary characterization of each teacher type.

Teacher Types Associated with the Quantity of Work Theme. Mean, hard, and strict teachers were perceived as requiring students to do more work than easy, fun or nice teachers. Not surprisingly, easy teachers are most frequently associated with giving less work and hard teachers are most frequently associated with giving more work. No mention was made of good or boring teachers.

The frequency with which fun and nice teachers were associated with giving less work, and the number of times mean teachers were associated with more work, bears comment. It would appear that the quantity of work students are expected to complete has a direct influence on their overall affective evaluation of the teacher. Teachers can be "nice" or "fun" if they do not work students too hard. Conversely, they can be considered "mean" if they expect students to produce more work than students believe reasonable.

The moderately strong association of strict teachers with the more work contrast pole is also of interest. Part of the teachers' strictness has to do with the productivity requirements they establish. The perceptions of teachers as strict does not -- as might have been expected -- result solely from disciplinary practices.

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Definition Statements for the Twelve Themes Associated with Types of Teachers

	ACADEMIC WORK						INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITY				CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE								PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS					
	Quantity of Work		Difficulty of Work		Grading Standards		Quality of Explanations		Individual Assistance		Disciplinary Strategy		Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior		Student Self-Management		Affective Character		Temperament		Temper		Relationships with Students	
	Less	More	Easy	Hard	Lenient	Demanding	Inadequate	Clear	Not Available	Available	Punishment	Warning	Low	High	Discouraged	Encouraged	Disagreeable	Engaging	Unappealing	Appealing	Yells	Doesn't Yell	Uncaring	Interested
MEAN	0	2 (14)*	0	0	0	1 (17)	2 (50)	0	6 (67)	0	12 (50)	0	7 (41)	0	7 (30)	0	2 (15)	1 (4)	3 (38)	0	6 (75)	0	4 (80)	0
HARD	0	7 (50)	0	2 (33)	0	3 (50)	2 (50)	0	0	0	1 (4)	0	0	0	1 (4)	0	0	0	2 (25)	0	0	0	0	0
EASY	8 (47)	0	10 (77)	0	1 (50)	0	0	0	0	1 (7)	0	2 (22)	0	2 (29)	0	2 (15)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (11)	0	0
GOOD	0	0	0	0	1 (50)	0	0	4 (67)	0	2 (13)	0	1 (11)	1 (6)	0	0	1 (8)	0	3 (13)	0	5 (24)	0	1 (11)	0	3 (25)
STRICT	0	5 (36)	0	4 (67)	0	2 (33)	0	0	3 (33)	0	8 (33)	0	8 (47)	0	15 (65)	0	0	0	3 (38)	1 (5)	2 (25)	0	0	0
BORING	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11 (85)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (20)	0
FUN	4 (24)	0	1 (8)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 (20)	0	0	0	1 (14)	0	8 (62)	0	14 (58)	0	7 (33)	0	1 (11)	0	4 (33)
NICE	5 (29)	0	2 (15)	0	0	0	0	2 (33)	0	9 (60)	3 (13)	6 (67)	1 (6)	4 (57)	0	2 (15)	0	6 (25)	0	8 (38)	0	6 (67)	0	5 (42)

*Percentages based on column totals

No mention was made of the quantity of work theme in regard to good or boring teachers. This suggests that the students did not perceive the proficiency of their teachers or the lassitude they inspire to be related to the amount of work they assigned.

Teacher Types Associated with the Difficulty of Work Theme. Hard and strict teachers were characterized as assigning difficult work, while easy, fun and nice teachers were recognized as giving students easy work. No mention was made of mean, good, or boring teachers.

When one considers the teacher types most frequently associated with each contrast pole, we find easy teachers were most frequently described as giving easy work and strict teachers most frequently associated with hard work. Although the characterization of easy teachers seems appropriate, the more frequent association of strict rather than hard teachers with difficult work is somewhat surprising and bears examination. First, this result may be a methodological artifact stemming from the unstructured interview methodology. Given more structured procedures, hard teachers might be shown to be the teacher type most frequently associated with hard work. Alternatively, if one can have confidence in the results displayed, when this finding is taken together with those resulting from examination of the quantity of work theme, the data suggest that students discriminate among teachers they consider hard and those they term strict. Hard teachers are perceived to assign large quantities of work, while strict teachers are known to assign work which is difficult.

It is interesting to note that twice as many of the definition statements referred to easy rather than hard work, and nearly all of these statements were made with respect to the definition of an easy teacher. This overrepresentation of definition statement at the less difficult contrast pole may suggest that teachers who do not assign hard work consistently make students' classroom experience more tolerable. Students may take great pleasure in those classes which do not demand great effort. Comments from some of the students interviewed in the current study suggested that they would gladly tolerate boredom as the price for easy work.

Teacher Types Associated with the Grading Standards Theme. Special caution should be exercised with the interpretation of the types of teachers mentioned in conjunction with the grading standards theme because the total number of definition statements was small. Nevertheless, the same general pattern of results seen with the previous two themes appears once more. Mean, hard, and strict teachers were associated with the demanding contrast pole, while easy and good teachers were associated with the lenient contrast pole. No definition statements referred to boring, fun, or nice teachers.

Teacher Types Associated with the Quality of Explanations Theme. In those definition statements which refer to the quality of explanations theme, mean and hard teachers were spoken of as providing inadequate explanations, while good and nice teachers were characterized

as giving clear explanations. Easy, strict, boring, and fun teachers were not mentioned with reference to this theme.

Because of the relatively small number of definition statements, discussion of this theme must proceed tentatively, but it is intriguing that a greater number of definition statements described the clear, rather than the inadequate, contrast pole. This may suggest that good instructional practice is quite salient to students, in contrast perhaps to the mediocre and confusing instruction which is often their daily fare.[5]

Comment must be made about the frequency with which good teachers were described as giving clear explanations. These definition statements accounted for over half the definition statements representing the clear contrast pole, and 40 percent of the definition statements for the theme as a whole. As discussed in the previous analysis section, one characteristic students attributed to good teachers was the teachers' ability in explaining themselves and their subject matter to their students. Teachers perceived as good or nice (adjectives suggesting a positive emotional tone) were contrasted with teachers found to be mean or hard (adjectives implying a negative affective evaluation). Thus, an instructor's skill as a teacher may not only affect students' learning, it may affect their attitude toward the teacher, and by extension, the way in which students behave in that teacher's class.

Teacher Types Associated with the Individual Assistance Theme. Mean and strict teachers were described as providing inadequate individual assistance, with the greater percentage of definition statements made in reference to mean teachers. At the other contrast pole, easy, good, fun, and nice teachers were described as being available to answer students' questions. This time nice teachers were described in the greatest percentage of definition statements. No mention was made of hard or boring teachers in reference to the instructional assistance theme.

The implicit comparison of nice and mean teachers in regard to the Individual Assistance theme is instructive, and again suggests that teachers' instructional practices have a definite influence on the affective evaluation they receive from their students. The perception of "meanness" is not delimited, as one might expect, to the teacher's style of classroom management or disciplinary privations, but can extend to the way in which teachers carry out their instructional programs. To refuse to answer students' questions and give them the assistance to which they considered themselves legitimately entitled was perceived as a mean, unfair, unnecessary, and punitive act, and may suggest an arbitrary display of power, rather than the appropriate exercise of instructional prerogatives. Conversely, a teacher who facilitates student learning by providing the help necessary to reduce confusion and assist comprehension was perceived as a "nice" individual who cared about student learning.

This line of argument -- that students view the availability of instructional assistance as an interpersonal matter with affective

consequences, rather than purely a question of instructional technique -- is further supported by the fact that nice teachers were more frequently mentioned as providing adequate aid in the classroom than were good teachers. Further, while one might hypothesize that hard teachers require students to complete their work with a minimum of instructional assistance, hard teachers were not mentioned at all in reference to this theme. These findings, in combination with those discussed in relation to the previous theme, confirm the affective importance students attach to certain instructional practices.

Teacher Types Associated with the Disciplinary Strategy Theme. Definition statements describing mean, hard, strict and nice teachers defined the punishment contrast pole, while descriptions of easy, good, and nice teachers defined the warning contrast pole. The association of mean and strict teachers appears unambiguous because of the large number of definition statements characterizing these two teacher types. The association of hard and nice teachers with the punishment pole, as well as easy and good teachers with with the warning pole is more problematic because of the small number of definition statements involved. involved. In light of the small number or absence of definition statements referring to hard, easy, good, boring, and fun teachers, it would appear that disciplinary strategies do not play a major role in their characterization.

Students associated nice teachers with discipline approaches which utilized both warnings and punishment. Two interrelated interpretations of this finding may be suggested. First, nice teachers may be perceived as able to vary their disciplinary strategy according to the individual case in question, although they generally warn students that their punishment is imminent. Alternatively, the "niceness" of teachers may be perceived as a global attribute which has no distinct relationship to the disciplinary strategies which these teachers employ. While nice teachers may be expected to warn students before punishing them, the use of immediate punishment without warning is not considered out of character and, perhaps more importantly, may not diminish their fundamental "niceness."

The tone of the definition statements which make up the Disciplinary Strategy theme suggests strongly that students preferred to be in the classes of teachers who punished rarely and warned much. Students disliked, as Student A14 remarked, "getting in trouble," and appreciated the advance notice which teachers' warnings provided.

Teacher Types Associated with the Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior Theme. Mean, good, strict, and nice teachers were mentioned with respect to the low contrast pole of the tolerance for inappropriate behavior theme, while easy, fun and nice teachers were mentioned in conjunction with the opposite pole. Not surprisingly, mean and strict teachers were most frequently mentioned as having a low tolerance for misbehavior; definition statements about these teachers accounted for approximately 90 percent of the statements describing the low contrast pole. No mention was made of hard or boring teachers in relation to this theme.

Because there were relatively few definition statements referring to nice teachers, we offer the following interpretation with some uncertainty. The appearance of nice teachers at both ends of the tolerance continuum confirms our previous suggestion that students' perceptions of nice teachers are neither defined nor constrained by the different disciplinary approaches employed in their classrooms.

It is somewhat surprising that hard teachers were not characterized as having a low tolerance for misbehavior. This omission suggests that the management procedures teachers employ are not a salient part of students' perceptions of the teacher's "hardness."

Teacher Types Associated with the Student Self-Management Theme. Mean, hard, and strict teachers were perceived as discouraging student self-management, while easy, good, fun, and nice teachers were seen as encouraging students to take an active role in managing their classroom behavior and activities.

The perception of strict teachers as limiting the classroom mobility and academic initiative described by this theme is not surprising. Such teachers, as one student remarked, generally have "a bunch of things you're not supposed to do." The association of mean teachers with the discouraged contrast pole suggests that instructors who curtailed students' prerogatives to manage their classroom affairs were sometimes perceived as unfair and arbitrary. In contrast, students found it "fun" to be with teachers who gave students some amount of freedom in the classroom and allowed early adolescents' needs for sociability, mobility, and autonomy to express themselves in a controlled fashion.

Teacher Types Associated with the Affective Character Theme. Boring teachers were described as having generally disagreeable classes, while good, fun, and nice teachers were characterized as engaging students in their schoolwork. Mean teachers appeared at both contrast poles, and if one can have faith in the small number of definition statements in question, their classes were more frequently characterized as disagreeable than engaging. No mention was made of hard, easy, or strict teachers.

These data suggest two points for discussion. First, the fact that no definition statements involving hard, easy, or strict teachers were made suggests that the defining characteristics of these three teacher types do not include students' affective evaluations of such teachers' personalities or instructional programs. Hard and strict teachers do not necessarily have disagreeable classes, and teachers who give easy assignments are not perceived as directing pleasant and engaging class periods. Second, the association of mean teachers with both disagreeable and engaging classes may suggest that in some instances the generally negative instructional and managerial characteristics discussed in relation to previous themes which have been associated with mean teachers do not inevitably lead students to perceive the classes of such teachers as disagreeable. Other factors such as the presence of friends or the nature of the assignments may provide a positive counterbalance to the negative perceptions students

have of mean teachers. Although such an interpretation must be speculative, since it is based on the presence of a single definition statement, it gives rise to the question of how significant a factor a teacher's "meanness" is in students' global evaluation of the affective character of a particular class, and when this characteristic may be outweighed by other considerations. Finally, it is interesting that the preponderance of definition statements referred to engaging rather than disagreeable classroom experiences. This numerical imbalance of definition statements may suggest that truly engaging classroom experiences are unusual events and thus worth remarking upon.

Teacher Types Associated with the Temperament Theme. Mean and hard teachers were characterized as having unappealing personalities, while good, fun and nice teachers were described as having appealing personalities. Strict teachers appeared at both contrast poles while no mention was made of easy or boring teachers. Several points suggest themselves for discussion. First, since strict teachers were characterized as having both unappealing and appealing temperaments, it would appear that they were perceived as strict more on the basis of their instructional and management practices than their characteristics as individuals. Although such an interpretation must be speculative, it is as if students were saying that some strict teachers have appealing temperaments while others do not; thus the locus of teachers' strictness lies outside their personal characteristics. Second, the lack of association of boring teachers and the unappealing contrast pole implies that students separated their perceptions of teachers as boring instructors responsible for disagreeable and unpleasant classes from their perceptions of these teachers as individual personalities. Such a discrimination suggests that students view some disagreeable classroom experiences as resulting from the instructional skill of teachers rather than flaws in their personalities.

Types of Teachers Associated with the Temper Theme. Mean and strict teachers were characterized as losing their tempers and yelling at their classes, while easy, good, fun, and nice teachers were described as maintaining equanimity. No mention was made of hard or boring teachers. The numerical contrast suggested between mean teachers (who yell) and nice teachers (who do not) is striking and reinforces once more the dichotomy between positively and negatively evaluated teacher types. The infrequent association of the remaining teacher types with the temper theme suggests that the emotional volatility or restraint displayed by hard, easy, good, boring or fun teachers is is not one of their defining characteristics. The definition statements which made up this theme suggest strongly that, for many students, being yelled at was not only unpleasant but also frightful. Once more, mean teachers appear to be associated with an unfair exercise of their institutional status. Should students become angry and raise their voices to a teacher, a behavioral "plan," a referral, or explusion could result. In contrast, teachers seemed to have the prerogative to berate students at will. Those teachers who exercised this prerogative were perceived as being mean to students.

Types of Teachers Associated with the Relationship with Students Theme. Mean and strict teachers were described as being uncaring, while good, fun, and nice teachers were perceived as being interested in their students. No definition statements were made with respect to hard, easy, or strict teachers.

The characterization of mean teachers as uncaring would seem to follow as a consequence of the instructional, managerial, and disciplinary practices which have been described earlier as unjust and arbitrary exercises of power from the students' perspective. Conversely, the personal interest that good, fun, and nice teachers take in their students also seems to be reflected in their instructional and managerial behaviors. The neglect of hard and easy teachers in relation to this theme suggests that students do not perceive the difficulty of the work teachers assign to be related to the concern teachers express for their students. Similarly, teachers' strictness also does not appear to be related to the relationships they establish with their students.

Summary Profile and Discussion of the Eight Teacher Types. The preceding discussion has examined the relationship of teacher types and the perceptual themes which emerged from the analysis of the definition statements on a theme-by-theme basis. Table 3 unites all foci, themes and contrast poles to present a summary profile of the teacher types, as well as a full explication of the meaning of the cultural terms in question.

The four foci of Academic Work, Instructional Facility, Classroom Experience and Personal Characteristics appear along the top margin of Table 3. Individual themes are listed below the appropriate focus. The eight cultural terms describing teacher types are listed along the left margin of the table. Cell entries displaying contrast poles appear when three or more students (roughly 15 percent of the sample) referred to a specific contrast pole to characterize a teacher type. In the one instance, when both contrast poles were mentioned by three or more students, both poles appear in the cell. Blank cells indicate that fewer than three students referred to a theme and contrast pole to describe a teacher type. (The criterion of three definition statements was established to ensure that this summary analysis would reflect cultural understanding rather than individual idiosyncrasies.)

Mean teachers. Seventh-graders perceived that mean teachers made it difficult for students to work successfully by failing to provide the individual help they needed to complete their assigned work. The disciplinary strategy of mean teachers was one that emphasized immediate punishment rather than initial warnings. Congruent with this disciplinary approach was the fact that mean teachers exhibited a low tolerance for inappropriate behavior and discouraged students from taking an active role in managing their classroom activities. Students considered mean teachers to have unappealing temperaments and spoke of their frequent and vocal fits of temper. These teachers also were perceived as uncaring and uninterested in their students.

Table 3. Summary Profile of the Eight Teacher Types

	ACADEMIC WORK			INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITY		CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE				PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS		
	Quantity of Work	Difficulty of Work	Grading Standards	Quality of Explanations	Individual Assistance	Disciplinary Strategy	Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior	Student Self-Management	Affective Character	Temperament	Temper	Relationship With Students
MEAN					Not Available	Punishment	Low	Discouraged		Unappealing	Yells	Uncaring
HARD	More Work		Demanding									
EASY	Less Work	Easy Work										
GOOD				Clear					Engaging	Appealing		Interested
STRICT	More Work	Hard Work			Not Available	Punishment	Low	Discouraged		Unappealing		
BORING									Dis-agreeable			
FUN	Less Work				Available			Encouraged	Engaging	Appealing		Interested
NICE	Less Work				Available	Warning or Punishment	High		Engaging	Appealing	Doesn't Yell	Interested

Three different foci encompassing seven separate themes were salient in the definition of mean teachers. The term "mean" evidently had a considerable range of significance for seventh-graders and encompassed a number of complex forms of behavior. A consistent thread, however, which ran through many of the definition statements was that mean teachers treated their classes unfairly and refused to show students the basic trust and respect they felt to be their due. Moreover, mean teachers were often viewed as being unfair, arbitrary and self-serving when teaching students or controlling inappropriate behavior. One of the definitions given the word mean in Websters New Collegiate Dictionary is "characterized by petty selfishness and malice" (1979:706). This definition would seem to fit our students' conceptions of a mean teacher well.

Hard teachers. Hard teachers were characterized by the large amount of work they assigned and the demanding grading standards they applied in the evaluation of this work. The three other foci -- instructional facility, classroom experience, and personal characteristics -- were not pertinent in describing hard teachers. The adjective "hard" when applied to teachers evidently had a limited range of meaning, for it was only salient with respect to a single focus. Consequently, it did not imply the overall positive or negative affective evaluation of teachers and classroom experience suggested by some of the other teacher terms.

Easy teachers. In contrast to hard teachers, easy teachers assigned lesser quantities of work. These assignments were also perceived as easy to complete. As was found with the previous teacher type, the adjective "easy" had a restricted range of meaning and was salient only in regard to the academic work focus. No global affective characterization was given to easy teachers.

Good teachers. Students described good teachers as being able to communicate clearly and help students to fully understand the assigned material. Such teachers were more strongly associated with the quality of explanations theme than any other type of teacher. In addition, good teachers were considered to maintain enjoyable and engaging classes, possess appealing temperaments, and demonstrate interest in their students.

The range of meaning assigned to the concept of a good teacher was greater than for the previous two teacher types and encompassed three foci: instructional facility, classroom experience, and personal characteristics.

It is interesting to note that the good teacher was not viewed as the antithesis of the mean teacher, although comparisons do arise. The defining characteristics of both good and mean teachers were encompassed by the same three foci: instructional facility, classroom experience and personal characteristics. The nature of the academic work assigned was not a defining characteristic of either teacher type. Within the three common foci, there were only two times when good and mean teachers were described using contrasting poles of the same themes, and both of these themes referred to the personal characteristics of the teacher types. Good teachers were viewed as having

appealing temperaments and being being interested in their students; mean teachers were perceived as having unappealing temperaments and not caring about their students. Other salient contrasts occurred within common foci, but involved differing themes and contrast poles. Good teachers were viewed as explaining material and assignments clearly, while mean teachers were unavailable to students and did not provide individual assistance. Good teachers' classes were recognized for their engaging character, while mean teachers' classes were typified as social situations where students were quickly and angrily punished for slight amounts of inappropriate behavior and where students were not given responsibility for managing their own classroom activities. The management strategy employed by good teachers received slight attention from students; perhaps the classrooms of such teachers were well organized so that continuing discipline problems were rare and did not take a prominent role in students' perceptions.

Strict teachers. Strict teachers were perceived by students to assign a great deal of work. Like mean teachers, they were not available to provide instructional assistance, their classroom disciplinary strategies utilized punishment, they exhibited a low tolerance for misbehavior, and discouraged students self-management. In terms of their personal characteristics, strict teachers were described as having unappealing temperaments.

The comparison of strict and mean teachers is instructive. The adjective "strict" has a complex set of meanings and the strict teacher, in students' perceptions, shares many significations with the mean teacher. Missing from the characterizations of the strict teacher (and present in the description of the mean teacher) were two negative characterizations within the personal characteristics focus. While the mean teacher was spoken of as yelling at students and not caring about them as individuals, no such characterizations were associated with the strict teacher. Students did not squeal with delight when describing a strict teacher, but they did not attribute personal vindictiveness and arbitrary exercise of power to this teacher; such characterizations were applied to the mean teacher. In addition, no mention was made of the nature of the relationships they established with their students.

Strict teachers would seem to share mean teachers' concerns with with maintaining instructional distance as well as control of the classroom, but they managed their classrooms in such a way that students did not feel attacked, treated unfairly, or completely disregarded. Perhaps at the heart of a mean teacher is a strict teacher who has overstepped the bounds of humane treatment and moved from "meaning business" to "being mean."

Boring teachers. Boring teachers were characterized by the disagreeable nature of their classes. Few comments pertaining to the other themes were made about boring teachers. It appears that when a teacher was boring, nearly all other characteristics of this individual, as well as the curriculum, eluded discernment. Of all the cultural terms examined in this study, the gerund "boring" had the most restricted

range of meaning, and referred only to the affective character of students' classroom experiences.

Fun teachers. Fun teachers, like easy teachers, were perceived as assigning little work. They provided students with individual help and, in so doing, may have demonstrated the qualities that led to their perception as being "fun." They encouraged students to manage their classroom activities and exhibited appealing temperaments. Fun teachers did not yell at their classes, and, like the good and the nice teachers, they were interested in their students. Students considered their classroom experiences with fun teachers to be engaging.

The term "fun" had a wide range of meaning and drew its significance from all four of the foci. Significant contrasts appear when fun teachers are compared to mean teachers, and these two teacher types were often characterized using contrasting poles of the same theme. Fun teachers were perceived as offering individual assistance, encouraging students to manage their classroom activities, having appealing temperaments, and showing interest in their students. Mean teachers received the opposite characterizations.

Nice teachers. Nice teachers were described as assigning less work than hard or strict teachers, and providing individual help to students. In terms of disciplinary strategy, they used either warnings or immediate punishments, depending perhaps on what they believed to be an appropriate response to misbehavior. Compared with strict and mean teachers, nice teachers displayed more tolerance for misbehavior. They maintained classroom environments and used learning activities which engaged their students, and they were described as being appealing individuals who did not yell at and were interested in their students.

Students used all four foci to characterize nice teachers. The contrast poles associated with the qualities of nice teachers and their classrooms invariably suggest students' positive attitudes. Even the fact that nice teachers sometimes punish without warning does not alter the appreciative tone of the definition statements. From the student's perspective, to characterize a teacher as being nice is a tribute. Nice teachers were perceived to have students' interests at heart. They were considerate of students' feelings and respected them as human beings. They demonstrated tolerance for "goofing around" and were not unreasonable in the amount of work they assigned. When students had problems with that work, nice teachers helped them to master their difficulties.

Summary and Conclusion

We believe that we have demonstrated that a clear, organized semantic structure can be found that underlies the terms that junior high school students use to describe and their teachers. To summarize, the structure was conceptualized in the following form: The highest level of abstraction and generalizability were four foci,

each of which subsumed between two and four themes. Each theme referred to a spectrum of individual variation of a teacher's possible behavior and style of personality, with two evaluatively opposed contrast poles at which students' descriptions clustered.

The focus of academic work subsumed the three themes, quantity of work, difficulty of work, and grading standards. The instructional facility focus subsumed two themes: quality of explanations and individual assistance. The third focus, classroom experience, subsumed the themes of disciplinary strategy, tolerance for inappropriate behavior, student self-management and affective character. The final focus, personal characteristics, united the themes of temperament, temper, and relationship with students.

Together, these foci and themes provide students with a semiotic space which is rich enough to convey their experiences of school life, and at the same time has the definition and specificity necessary for effective and precise communication with peers. The structure provides an insight into the communication system, and hence the perceptions and values, of the sub-culture which students form for themselves within a school. In gaining this insight, we may be able to achieve some understanding of the way that schooling functions in our junior high schools, and also a conception of some of the ways in which it could be better tailored to the interests, predelictions, and beliefs of the students it is intended to serve.

Notes

[1]For exceptions, see Everhart, 1979; Metz, 1978; Osborn, 1962 White, 1971.

[2]One student was unable to be interviewed during this second cycle, and one target student, who had missed the fall interview, later joined the group.

[3]Words in upper-case type are those of the interviewer.

[4]Mr. Arnold is a pseudonym.

[5]This comment is made in light of the instructional practices depicted in: Rounds, T.S., Ward, B.A., Mergendoller, J.R., and Tikunoff, W.J., Organization of Instruction: Elementary School-Junior High School Comparison. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1982; Report EPSSP-82-3.

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